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S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT

STOCKTON-UPON-TEES,

On Wednesday, February 25th, 1795,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A GENERAL FAST.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL CLAPHAM, M. A.

L E E D S:

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TO THE
HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND
SHUTE BARRINGTON, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM;
THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE IS,
WITH THE HIGHEST RESPECT,

INSCRIBED BY

HIS LORDSHIP'S MOST OBEDIENT

AND DEVOTED SERVANT,

SAMUEL CLAPHAM.

YARM, March 2d, 1795.

Lately published, by the same Author,

- I. A SERMON, preached at Sunderland, for the Benefit of the Charity-School, December 16th, 1792.
- II. A SERMON, preached at Knaresbrough, for the Benefit of the Sunday-Schools, June 29th, 1793.
- III. A SERMON, preached at the Visitation holden at Skipton, May 12th, 1794.
- IV. A SERMON, preached at the Visitation of the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Chester, holden at Boroughbridge, September 2d, 1794; in which is impartially considered, how far METHODISM conduces to the Interests of Christianity, and the Welfare of Society. Published by his LORDSHIP'S COMMAND.
- V. A SERMON, preached at Knaresbrough, before the Royal Knaresbrough Volunteer Foresters, October 12th, 1794. Dedicated, by Permission, to THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD LOUGHBOROUGH, LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR OF GREAT BRITAIN.



A
S E R M O N, &c.

J E R E M I A H XVIII.—II.

SPEAK TO THE MEN OF JUDAH, AND TO THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM,
SAYING, THUS SAITH THE LORD; BEHOLD I FRAME EVIL AGAINST
YOU, AND DEVISE A DEVICE AGAINST YOU: RETURN YE NOW
EVERY ONE FROM HIS EVIL WAY, AND MAKE YOUR
WAYS AND YOUR DOINGS GOOD.

THE piety of our most religious and gracious Sovereign hath again called upon us individually and collectively to assemble in the presence of Almighty God, to “acknowledge” and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness;” to implore the forgiveness of our aggravated offences; and to beseech Him, in whose hands alone is the power of life and death, to “repent of the evil” that our provocations may have compelled him “to do unto us.” In a dutiful compliance with this religious command, “we turn unto the Lord in weeping, fasting, and “praying.”

A day of national humiliation, a day set apart for the express purpose of confessing and lamenting our sins, naturally produces in a serious mind, many melancholy reflections. The design of this day's appointment is, to beg the protection of the Almighty “against the declared enemies to all Christian Kings, “Princes, and States.”* The menace of the subversion of our Church

Church

* See Form of Prayer for 1794.

Church and Constitution, so loudly vaunted, and so widely spread—because under their shadow we derive consolation to our hearts, and protection to our persons—may have concurred with many other justifiable causes to impel this kingdom to encounter the dangers, and hazard the difficulties of war, thereby to preserve the profession of christianity, and to defend the blessings of civil liberty.

That the over-ruling Providence of God may continue to us these mercies, by which, as a nation, we have been hitherto so pre-eminently distinguished, we are this day, with bended knees, and contrite hearts, assembled in public supplication.

WAR, even to the victor, as well as to the vanquished, is always an extensive and a grievous calamity. I will not excite your sensibility by a recital of its various and affecting evils. I will not describe to you the anxious parent anticipating the loss of a beloved child, the solace of his cares; the sympathetic grief of sons and daughters, foreboding the death of an affectionate father, the source—the only source, it may be—of their subsistence. I will not alarm your apprehensions by representing the unavoidable interruption to our commerce, by which some occupations are materially affected, though justice requires me to declare, that it is by no means so great as is often with malicious industry, and too often with mischievous effect, represented. I will not shock your imaginations by leading you to the seat of war, where we should behold authorized violence, licentious rapine, and wanton slaughter; the agonies of plundered families, the massacres of ancient and venerable cities, the confusion of desolated provinces, and the devastation of “a fruitful land made “barren,” I would rather hope through the merciless ravages of the assailants; than for “the wickedness of them that dwell “therein.”

“ therein.” I will not wound your piety by setting before your eyes the numbers who are hurried out of this world into another, depraved in heart, and profligate in manners, without a sense of God, and Religion, and Futurity on their minds. Such is the evil, complex in its nature, and tremendous in its consequences, which, if God hath not appointed, he hath for our sins permitted “ to be framed against us. Let us return then every one from “ his evil way, and make our ways and our doings good.”

As ambassadors of the Gospel of peace, we esteem it not our indispensable duty—whatever the tongue of reproach may have uttered against us—to join indiscriminately in the clamorous cry of peace, peace; dictated, it might seem, by mistaken humanity, narrow policy, factious opposition, or sordid interest; since we are informed by those on whom alone we can depend for just information, men who indeed are calumniated, but for no other reason than that their stations provoke envy—men whose talents are above the reach of imposition, and whose integrity defies suspicion—that an honourable and a permanent peace cannot, in the present juncture of affairs, be made. Inauspicious as the war has in some eventful circumstances been in its progress, through the dispirited supineness perhaps of some of our allies, and the unfaithfulness of others, yet, may we not trust, under the determined resolution of confining the principal exertions, to what, in our national boast, and that assuredly not inglorious, we emphatically call *our own element*, it may be, under Providence, more successful in its issue? Still, “ the battle is not ours, but God’s.” To the God of Peace therefore we address our prayers, that, if we must still contend, He will grant us the victory; or rather that he would—to prevent the farther effusion of human blood—dispose our enemies to be at peace with us.

But

But whilst we deprecate the evils of foreign war, we are not to forget that we have been threatened with a still greater calamity. An artful and a traiterous plan was in agitation to destroy our happy Constitution* in Church and State, but by the vigilance of those wise and able men to whom the Government of the country is committed, the scheme was discovered before it was ripe for execution. Abundant pains have been taken to persuade us that a Conspiracy existed only in the imaginations of those who were haunted with fear, and terrified with alarm. On the most conclusive evidence however we may assert, that—although through the tender spirit of our laws, the Conspirators might not be convicted—a conspiracy *did* exist; and how far it might, had it not been frustrated, have involved the several branches of the Legislature, together with every respectable order of the community, is known to Him alone, who sees events in their causes, and “who abhors both the “blood-thirsty and the deceitful man.” Of that system of government which originates in usurpation, and which of consequence indulges the malignity of enraged passions—passions awakened by jealousy, and cherished by fear—a neighbouring kingdom is a striking example.

It is, I trust, unnecessary to exhort this auditory, so invariably eminent for loyalty to their Sovereign, to co-operate with the Magistracy of the Realm, in suppressing all treasonable attempts, all seditious efforts, which would, by their natural tendency, bereave

* “*By Constitution*”—says one of the most eloquent of writers—“we mean the “assemblage of laws, institutions, and customs, derived from certain fixed principles “of reason, directed to certain fixed objects of public good, that compose the general “system, according to which the Community hath agreed to be governed. By “*Government*, we mean that particular tenor of conduct, which a chief Magistrate, “and inferior Magistrates, under his direction and influence, hold in the administration of public affairs.”—*See Lord Belingbroke's Dissertation on Parties.*”

us of the comforts we now possess, and the blessings we now enjoy. Supineness would be approbation—Connivance would be guilt. Our ruin might, before we are aware of it, be completed, our property transferred, and our lives endangered. Our Constitution, the work of ages, the boast of our own country, and the admiration of all others, might, in an instant, be annihilated. A spark, issuing from glowing embers, will enkindle the devouring flame, which, before it can be extinguished, rages throughout the whole edifice, and leaves only a ghastly skeleton of disfigured walls, a remaining evidence of indolent indifference, a stinging reproach to guilty inattention.

The issue of war is uncertain; but Treason may, by vigilance, be discovered; Sedition may, by timely exertions, be suppressed. To overthrow the Church, to dissolve the Monarchy, to overawe the Senate, with such intention—call it by what name you please—was our ruin planned:—Our souls are impressed with the most devout thanksgivings unto Thee, O Lord, that it failed in the execution! Let us therefore, every one, sensible of the danger from which we have been delivered, “return from his evil way, and make our ways and our doings good.”

What need there is of general amendment, of individual reformation, in order to entitle us to “a good hope” in the mercy and protection of Providence, a very superficial observation upon the conduct and manners of mankind will inform us. As the Prophet Jeremiah was directed to “speak to the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,” so may the Ministers of the Gospel address themselves to their respective congregations, “saying, Thus saith the Lord, “Return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. Let the priests, the ministers

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“ of the Lord,” from the most exalted rank, to the most subordinate station, remember the declared end of their ordination, to “ convert men from the error of their ways, and to save souls from death.” Let us all, in our several departments, take a fair and comprehensive view of our ministry, and impartially question ourselves of our utility to the community at large, by the influence of our example, and to our several congregations in particular, by the soundness of our doctrine, and the ardour of our zeal. As “ preachers of righteousness,” let us fairly ask ourselves, whether ANY, in consequence of our ministry, have been persuaded VITALLY and SUBSTANTIALLY, to embrace Christianity? If upon a review we find our hearers devoid of that knowledge “ which would make them wise unto salvation,” reformation, I do not mean in conduct, but in vigilance, will begin, where, in such case, it ought to begin, at the house of God. May we all see and feel that our duty is not faithfully discharged, until our congregations are by our labours increased, the altars of our several Churches crowded, the principles of our hearers improved, and their morals reclaimed! In this way let us convince the world that we are not, “ as we are slanderously reported of,” the burthens, but the bulwarks of the community*. Let those of the Laity, who are in an elevated sphere, whether distinguished by the splendour of hereditary possessions, or the comforts of acquired wealth, seriously interrogate themselves, whether their conduct is such, as in gratitude it ought to be, for such enviable blessings? Do they pass the Lord’s day in a regular attendance on public worship, and require of their servants and dependents the same religious homage to “ the Giver of every good gift?” Or rather, do not too many, instead of an uniformly regular observance of the divine ordinances, devote the Sunday, in disregard, I might say, in defiance

* See an admirable Charge by the Lord Bishop of London, delivered to his Clergy in 1794.

of God's strict injunction, to schemes of pleasure, or pursuits of gain? Or if they have no engagement to lead them to the profanation of the Sabbath, do they not set apart the morning, either to the adjusting their accounts, or with still greater indecency, to the public contempt of God's worship, by spending that part of the day, "in which many millions of people in almost every region of the earth are engaged in prostrating themselves before the Throne of Grace,"* "in nothing else but to tell or to hear some new thing?" Is not the evening service almost entirely neglected, as unnecessary and superfluous? Instead of impressing their own hearts with religious sentiments, and extending the influence of their example to their children, to their servants, to their neighbours, to the poor; do not many in that holy afternoon claim a prescriptive right to personal indulgence; often, I may say, generally appropriated above all other days in the week, to luxurious living, and intemperate gratifications? thus wantonly abusing those mercies with which God hath blessed them, at the very hour he is inviting them to "worship Him with holy worship!" Do not the higher classes of the community† seem

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to

* See a most excellent Sermon by the Lord Bishop of London, on the Sabbath.—Would to God it were engraven on the heart of every Christian!

† The accomplished Author I have just quoted, has expressed with so much feeling the advantages of a good example in the higher classes of the community, that, however familiar may be the writings of this distinguished Prelate to my readers, every one will, I am sure, think my arguments supported, and my page embellished by the following quotation.

"But though every one may thus make his light shine most usefully before men, yet the higher this light is placed, the wider will be its sphere, and the more extensive its influence. They therefore who by their birth, their station, their power, their wealth, their profession, their abilities, are set, as it were, upon an eminence, and held up to the observation of the world, are more especially bound to take heed unto their ways, since the good or the harm they may do by their conduct is inconceivable. It is very well known that the lower orders

" of

to erect, as it were, fortresses independent of God, and intrenching themselves under the feeble protection of entails, and the uncertain security of settlements, do they not, tacitly at least, hold this imposing language, "I shall never be removed?" If so, let them learn from the convulsions of a neighbouring kingdom, how insecure are all human possessions; and that, unless "the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh, but in vain." May they entitle themselves to his protection by a pious deportment, and an exemplary life!

But the Creator is not dishonoured by the Rich and the Great only. Irreligion pervades all orders and degrees of men. The same profanation of the Lord's-day—the same disregard of public worship—the same inattention to religious exercises, are observable throughout every description of people. When the Sacrament of the Lord's-Supper is administered, almost "all with one consent begin to make excuse." Men tottering under the weight of infirmity and years, who can scarce be supposed to "taste what they eat, and what they drink," live in an habitual contempt of that divine command which their Redeemer, the very night before he expiated their sins by his death upon the cross, so solemnly enjoined—"this do in remembrance of me." There

"of men almost constantly take the cast and colour of their lives from those above them. The manners of the people, therefore, are to a great degree in the hands of their superiors, and may be moulded by them into whatever form they please. What a noble opportunity of doing good, does this afford to those superiors! An opportunity which to every man of benevolence, of public spirit, nay even of any honest ambition, must be such a *temptation* to right conduct, as one would think it impossible to withstand. What a fair and obvious path to reputation and applause is here marked out to the upper part of the world! How easy is it for them to merit, and to obtain, a place amongst the most distinguished friends and benefactors of mankind, *merely by living as they ought*; by being *as eminently good, as they are eminently great*."—See the whole of the last Sermon in vol. 2d.

There are other religious duties which it is equally incumbent on the Clergy to enforce, and on all to fulfil; but which, it is to be feared, are equally contemned. Are those men who absent themselves from an uniform attendance on the Church, and a worthy celebration of the Sacrament, punctual in the observance of FAMILY WORSHIP? Do they, every night before they retire to rest, assemble their household "meekly kneeling on their knees," to beg the protection of Him who alone can "defend them from all the perils and dangers of the night; from lightning and tempest, from murder, and from sudden death?" Besides the neglect of domestic devotion, we cannot but apprehend that men feel equally indisposed to the duty of private prayer. Do they retire to their closet, and "shutting their door, pray to their Father who seeth in secret?" In an age which boasts of its progress in civilization, and its attainments in refinement, both family and private prayer are considered by the man of gaiety as an insupportable interruption to his pleasures: he disputes with his Creator the necessity of his own injunctions: and he consoles himself with the reflection, that PRAYER TO GOD was intended only for the employment of the idle, the devotion of the credulous, or the refuge of the desponding.

There is one thing more which I cannot omit; the little attention which, in a religious sense, is paid to the rising generation.

Such is the prevailing fashion of the age, that children who are above the lower sphere of life, are not perhaps neglected in the improvement of their mind, and the cultivation of their manners. Personal address, and mental accomplishments, to please by the arts of insinuation, and to make their way by the force of talents, seem to be the solicitude every parent feels for his child. But to bring him up in the true faith and fear of God, to teach him to conduct

conduct himself with propriety as a citizen of a christian community, to inform his mind with the spirit of the gospel, and to fortify his virtue with a knowledge of the evidences of it, are seldom, I fear, among his lessons of instruction. The very small proportion of young people who attend public worship, and receive the holy Sacrament, awakens, in every reflecting mind, very awful apprehensions. The command of parents cannot on this point be imposed with authority, the injunction of masters cannot be pressed with earnestness; where then is the wonder that the grey hairs of so many fathers are, by the vicious conduct of their **UNTAUGHT*** offspring, "brought down with sorrow to the "grave?" We are emulous to impress upon our children accomplishments which attract admiration, and qualities which extort applause; but we feel, alas! no emulation in teaching them how to live, and how to die!

From the neglect of these essential, these christian duties, comes that deluge of wickedness which overflows the land. And until men are brought back to the regular, and conscientious discharge of them, we cannot with confidence hope in the protection of **JEHOVAH** to "save us from our enemies, and to put them to confusion that hate us. Return ye then," if ye would propitiate the mercy, and avert the displeasure of the Almighty, "every "one from his evil way, and make your ways, and your doings "good." Let a devout attendance on the Church, and a solemn celebration of the Sacrament, accompanied with daily prayer, both in your family and your closet, be the foundation of amendment, and there will arise a goodly superstructure, an assemblage of every civil, of every social, every moral, and every christian virtue.

* "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Be it then, my brethren, the united resolution of us all fe-
 riously to review our lives, and interest will unquestionably prescribe,
 and duty enforce an immediate amendment. Let us not content
 ourselves with a mere attendance on the service of the Church,
 and with repeating the prayers of humiliation and contrition ap-
 pointed for the occasion; but let our Christian principles impel
 us to fulfil the duties of our Christian calling. Let us with all
 the powers of our mind, and all the affections of our soul, enter
 into the design of our gracious Sovereign, in leading us to re-
 pentance, and exhorting us to amendment; we may then, with-
 out the imputation of presumption, hope, that the blessings of
 Heaven will not be withholden from this our land. Ten righte-
 ous men might have saved a City. God grant that the righte-
 ousness of this congregation may be signally instrumental in
 saving this Kingdom! God grant, that, to the loyalty of our
 principles, and the attachment to our King, we may all add the
 most unequivocal mark of love to our country, genuine virtue,
 and solid piety! in which we comprehend our supplications for
 its welfare, and our prayers for its prosperity. God grant that
 the devotions which are this day offered, may be accepted, and
 that the petitions this day made, may be granted, that
 we, and "our children's children" to the latest posterity,
 "may see our country in prosperity all their lives long! May
 "peace be within her walls, and plenteousness within her pa-
 "laces! Because of the house of the Lord our God," may we
 all with heart and hand unite "to do her good! And may
 "they," and they the most abundantly, "prosper that love
 "her!" Every hearer will, I trust, join with me in devoutly
 saying, AMEN, AMEN !!!

Be it then, my brethren, the united resolution of us all to
to review our lives, and to do so with unflinching
and duty, as an inward witness to the Church,
ourselves with a more abundant on the basis of the Church,
and with repeating the prayers of humiliation and confession
pointed for the occasion; but let our Christian principles
us to fill the duties of our Christian calling. Let us wish
the power of our spirit, and all the abilities of our mind, and
into the doing of our gracious Sovereign, in leading us to
penitence, and exhorting us to amendment; we may be
out the inspiration of perfection, hope, that the blessing of
Heaven will not be withdrawn from this our land. The
our men might have loved a King. God grant that the
outlets of this congregation may be fully illuminated in
living this Kingdom! God grant, that to the glory of our
principles, and the attachment to our King, we may all the
most unqualified mark of love to our country, Germany, and
and this day! In which we are united, our hope, our
in witness, and our prayer, as we are united, our hope,
the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God, and the
and the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God, and the
we, and "our children, children, to the Kingdom of God,
may, for our country, and the Kingdom of God, and the
"grant be within the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God,
"focal, focal, focal, focal, focal, focal, focal, focal, focal,
all with heart and hand, and the Kingdom of God, and the
"may, and may the well, and the Kingdom of God, and the
"may, and may the well, and the Kingdom of God, and the
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